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Changing workplace habits: from lunch a-la-desk to meetings on the run: a pilot initiative at the University of Wollongong, NSW

Abstract

Abstract of paper that presented at the Occupational Therapy Australia, 25th National Conference and Exhibition, 24-26 July 2013, Adelaide Convention Centre.

Keywords

desk, meetings, run, pilot, initiative, university, wollongong, nsw, lunch, la, habits, workplace, changing

Disciplines

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Changing workplace habits: From lunch a-la-desk to meetings on the run: A pilot initiative at the University of Wollongong, NSW

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Rationale

Significant health benefits are associated with physical activity however some workplace habits encourage sedentary postures. Walking 10,000 steps daily reduces disease risks whilst office workers average 3500 steps. UK research has demonstrated health benefits associated with participation in the Global Corporate Challenge (GCC), an international workplace initiative measuring daily step counts. The University of Wollongong (UOW) invited staff to remain active and adopt new habits during May to September 2012 by signing up for the challenge.

Objectives

Present outcomes of the GCC initiative regarding:

- (i) changing physical activity at work and increasing daily step count;
- (ii) awareness of health benefits for modifying workplace habits.

Approach

Daily steps were recorded using pedometers and logged via an on-line portal, monitoring individual and team performance against other participants internationally over 16 weeks. Two pilot research projects measured changes in physical health and wellbeing.

Results

A total 114 teams of 7 staff (n=798) enrolled in the GCC. At commencement 12% (n=95) self-reported averaging 10,000 daily steps. At completion 78% (n=663) averaged 10,000 steps or more per day. UOW ranked the most active university in the world and ranked 4th organisation in Australia. Measured changes in physical health and well being are discussed along with strengths and limitations of the pilot research projects.

Conclusions

Self perception of "an active lifestyle" was challenged when actual steps were measured. Staff modified work habits to boost daily step counts. The GCC and further research is likely to go ahead next year due to positive outcomes reported.